

INTRODUCTION

In the forward to the brochure announcing the institute, Robert B. Downs said, "Along with the vast expansion in recent years of libraries and school librarianship, there has emerged what is, in effect, a new profession--the school library supervisor. For administrative direction of school library systems--to guide their growth and development, to bring to them a broad educational philosophy, and to make uniform their methods and techniques--nearly all the states and the larger cities of the country now make provisions for supervisors."

Supervision of school libraries dates back to the close of the nineteenth century. Ruth Ersted,¹ in an article, tells of the appointment in the 1890's of an inspector in school libraries to the staff of the New York State Education Department. In 1891, the Wisconsin State Legislature authorized the appointment of a clerk to promote the establishment and control of school libraries. By 1904, the regents of New York State had appointed a school library supervisor and, in 1911, the Minnesota Legislature established the office of supervisor of school libraries. In 1915, Wisconsin changed the position of Library Clerk to Supervisor of School Libraries.

As reported by Dunbar and Lathrop,² in 1943, there were thirteen states having a position of State School Library Supervisor: Alabama, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Louisiana, Minnesota, Missouri, New York, North Carolina, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, and Wisconsin. Of the 13, New York, Virginia, and Wisconsin had found it necessary to appoint assistant supervisors to accomplish the work coming to the supervisor's office. In all states but one, Illinois, the supervisory unit at that time was in the state department of education.

By 1952, as reported by Ersted,³ 25 states had a position of State School Library Supervisor. To the former group could be added Florida, Mississippi, New Jersey, Kentucky, Connecticut, South Carolina, Texas, Michigan, Massachusetts, Arkansas, Washington, and Maryland. By this time also, the positions in Illinois and Indiana which had been under the state libraries had now been moved to the state department of education. By 1955, from the list in the American Library Association's Membership Directory⁴ of that date, 30 states had school library supervisory positions. Utah was dropped from the list, but new states were Arizona, Colorado, Oregon, Pennsylvania, South Dakota, and Vermont.

At the same time, the development of supervisory positions at the city, town, and county level, has also proceeded apace. The 1955 ALA Directory lists a total of 257 supervisors at the local level. They appear in some 33 different states, of which California has the most, a total of 41. Illinois

follows with 26; North Carolina 21; Michigan 18; Washington 17; New York 14; Florida 13; Oregon 12; and Arizona 10. The remaining states have only a few each. Only 118 local supervisors were listed in the 1949 issue of the same Directory. Prior to that date the Membership Directory did not list city, town, and county school library supervisors, although state supervisors were included.

School library supervisors throughout the country are beginning to feel their community of interest and problems. The first major conference of supervisors was held June 26-27, 1952 at the U.S. Office of Education, at which time 60 city, county, and state supervisors gathered from all parts of the country for an intensive workshop on supervision.⁵ For some years, school library supervisors have been meeting together at the American Library Association conferences.

The increase in the number of supervisory positions is, in a way, recognition of their value. A more positive measure is, of course, the improvement in library service where supervision has been introduced. Douglas has said, "Even a superficial consideration of statistical data will show the marked and rapid growth [of school libraries] in the states with supervisors and with few exceptions the more limited development in many of the others."⁶ Mildred Batchelder has also claimed as of 1950 that, "many good school libraries can be found in states without state school library supervisors, but the 25 states with such leadership have a higher general level of services than most states without supervisors."⁷

These are subjective evaluations to be sure, although the comments of people who are certainly competent to make judgments. No comprehensive, objective evaluations have yet been made, and it would be desirable that such be accomplished in the near future. Lucile Fargo's influential book on school library work has, in its several editions, pressed for the centralized organization of school libraries. In the latest edition she has this to say, "As the years have passed and demands for library service in the lower grades as well as the high school have grown, the organization, administration and supervision of school library service from a special department either in the public library or in the school system have in many cases become a necessity. Such centralization has proved its value. It is good educational practice, good administration, and good economy. It is good educational practice because it means a unified program and expert supervision and because the library needs of the system can be viewed as a whole, elementary schools and junior high schools receiving their due share of consideration with senior high schools where library work may actually be developing at the expense of the grades. It is good administration and good economy because much organizational work (cataloging, classifying, etc.) can be carried on more efficiently and more economically by an expert staff in a central office than by isolated and sometimes ill-prepared li -

brarians working independently and because books may often be centrally acquired at a better discount and with less expenditure of energy than when each librarian carries through the process independently. "8

To fill the posts of school library supervisors at any of the levels, employers have turned to the successful practitioner in the field. Without doubt some of the ablest librarians in school and children's and young people's work have been recruited for these posts. The positions on the whole are well-paying, carry a great deal of responsibility and influence, and challenge the best efforts of the most capable people.

Without any specific guidance, and often in a position of creating an entirely new endeavor, those who have been appointed to supervisory posts have had to proceed largely by trial and error. That they have proceeded so well is an indication of their ability, interest, industry, and imagination. But even granting their success, they are as a group and as individuals seeking assistance. As their need is immediate and specific, the best answer at the moment seems to be the provision of in-service training opportunities such as institutes and workshops. A full four-week workshop on school library supervision was held at the University of Illinois Library School under the direction of Mary Peacock Douglas in the summer of 1956. Undoubtedly there will be several activities of this type during the next few years throughout the country.

The papers that follow do not comprise a comprehensive discussion of the entire field of school library supervision. Neither do they provide a detailed manual of practice for the guidance of the newly appointed supervisor. They do, however, bring together some basic ideas and practical suggestions sufficient for an introduction to the subject. The fuller, definitive statement has yet to be written on this area of librarianship.

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